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## CFVI Awards 2023 Judith A. Towle Environmental Studies Fund to Cuban Conservationist

**Escalona's achievement marks the first-ever Towle grant to be awarded to a Cuban project**

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**Ailén Anido Escalona By. CFVI**

The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands has announced Ailén Anido Escalona from Gibara, Cuba, as the recipient of the 2023 Judith A. Towle Environmental Studies Fund Award.

This prestigious award, established at CFVI in 2003, is dedicated to supporting studies and activities addressing significant environmental issues across the insular Caribbean.

Escalona, who boasts 20 years of experience in bird conservation and currently works at the Museum of Natural History in Gibara, Holguín, Cuba, was selected from eight proposals submitted from various Caribbean locations, including St. Kitts, St. John, St. Croix, and St. Thomas. Her project, which has earned her a \$5,000 grant, focuses on developing and implementing strategies to mitigate the illegal trapping and trade of wild birds in Cuba – a critical environmental challenge plaguing the region.

According to CFVI, her proposal stood out for its direct alignment with the objectives of the Towle Fund, as it tackles a pressing cross-boundary environmental issue with significant impacts in the Caribbean. Judith Towle, the fund's namesake, along with two other reviewers, was particularly impressed by the proposal's comprehensive approach.

Escalona's project aims to involve local communities and public institutions, emphasizing public education and training at all levels, while also highlighting the need for policy change.

This year's award marks the first Towle grant to be awarded in Cuba and the 15th grant under the Towle Fund at CFVI. Escalona's project targets a site in Gibara, recognized as one of the most important migratory corridors on the island and among the three areas in the country where bird capture and trafficking are most prevalent.

Escalona, who holds a master of science degree in environmental management, is recognized for her strong credentials and well-designed project.